



Research article

Effects of a social media website on primary care givers' awareness of music therapy services in a neonatal intensive care unit



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ABSTRACT

Due to time constraints experienced by clinical staff in the hospital environment, traditional methods of educating and disseminating information about new services and treatments, for example music therapy, are often difficult and cumbersome. Social media blogs are emerging as a preferred option for healthcare professionals when needing to disseminate updated clinical and research information in a timely manner. The purpose of this pilot study was to gain information about the effect of a music therapy blog on (1) awareness of NICU music therapy services, and (2) usefulness of the blog as an information source for primary care givers working in a neonatal intensive care unit. Participants included 12 primary care physicians and practitioners working in a level three neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) in a large tertiary care facility in the South Eastern United States. Participants were randomized to two groups; group A received an email stimulus intervention for the first two weeks of the study while group B received the stimulus the last two weeks of the study. Results showed that there were significant results between the mid/post-test and pre/post-test for group A, but not for group B suggesting that the stimulus intervention helped motivate group A participants to visit the blog site even without the stimulus intervention the last two weeks of the study. Both groups reported high scores for the usefulness of the blog for acquiring information about NICU music therapy services.

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1. Introduction

The traditional methods through which physicians obtain educational information regarding their medical subspecialty are changing. In the past, medical knowledge was passed from one practitioner to the next within an apprenticeship model. Then, to improve access to information, medical schools employed eminent physicians to disseminate information to large numbers of students. As time went on, the medical profession relied heavily on scientific-evidence distributed through books and medical journals in a broadcast model (Spallek, O'Donnell, Clayton, Anderson, & Krueger, 2010).

To help organize and improve access to the copious amount of medical information, MEDLARS, the first electronic resource available to health care professionals, was created in 1965. Renamed MEDLINE, this resource dominated electronic access to health care information from the 1960's through the 1990's (Swiatek-Kelley, 2010). Even though it is known that MEDLINE is not an easy

database to use, researchers could search for information by entering limiters such as titles, authors and years to obtain the most complete and reliable data through Boolean logic (Coletti & Bleigh, 2001).

Consuming and managing up-to-date medical information for primary care and data-intensive specialties such as neonatology can be a laborious task for physicians. Due to gains in technology and research, the amount of knowledge that physicians will be required to learn and retain in the future will be more challenging than ever (McGowan et al., 2012). New models for learning and sharing information will help to ameliorate this issue.

2. Understanding the use of social media in the healthcare field

The implementation of social media, such as blogs, in health-care for obtaining updated information relating to research and best practice is becoming more popular among healthcare staff. Unlike the traditional forms of information and communication technologies used in health care, users typically create the content produced through social media for people with similar interests, allowing

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knowledge, answers and support to flow more efficiently in a professional social network (McGowan et al., 2012). There are many indicators validating the use of social media in the medical field. In a review of the use of social media in the healthcare context conducted by Grajales, Sheps, Ho, Novak-Lauscher, and Eysenbach (2014), the number of articles indexed on PubMed has nearly doubled each year in the last 4 years. Social media policies are being adopted and tested in various health care settings and journals are discussing methods of using social media for sharing and collaborating on new information as well as the effects of social media on clinicians.

There are many factors influencing physicians' use of social media. Panahi, Watson, and Partridge (2014) surveyed 24 physicians from around the world who frequently use social media and found that some of the major reasons for use was to stay connected with fellow colleagues, networking with a wider community, sharing knowledge and engaging in continued medical education. McGowan et al. (2012) found that out of 485 physicians, 24% contributed new information via social media on a daily basis, 57% perceived social media to be beneficial, engaging, and a good way to get current, high quality information, 57% also believed it helped them to provide better patient care. Many physicians who are adopting social media into their daily lives are using a variety of tools to access and share information such as email, podcasts, widgets, RSS feeds, and blogs (Cooper et al., 2012). There have been reports, however, that physicians are hesitant to embrace social media as a reliable educational resource. Reported challenges that keep physicians from adopting social media were maintaining confidentiality, finding time, lack of trust and information anarchy (Panahi et al., 2014).

3. The use of blogging in the medical community

Blogs are becoming a preferred way to access and disseminate information as well as collaborate with peers across professional social networks. In the late 1990's, the first social media sites were developed in the form of Web-logs, later know as blogs. These new web-based social platforms allowed for improved accessibility of information (both opinion and facts) by existing or new users in the community and a variety of topics to promote open, collaborative dialogues. They are considered to be the oldest and most established form of social media with articles as early as 2004 within medicine and family practice (Grajales et al., 2014).

Currently, there are more than 1.5 million weblogs worldwide, and a small, but increasing group of them focus on psychiatry, medicine and neuroscience. Educational institutions like The Mayo Clinic, have started using blogs to promote peer-to-peer communication and knowledge exchange. The Clinical Cases Blog acts as a virtual rounds and features cases dealing with immunology, cardiology, pulmonology, gastroenterology, etc. (Grajales et al., 2014). A survey studying reasons for why clinicians blog found that the major reasons were sharing practical knowledge or skills with others, influencing the way others think, and expressing oneself creatively (Kovic, Lulic, & Brumini, 2008).

4. The use of blogs for education

Even though the use of blogs by physicians and the medical community is growing, there is little research in the effect on learning for physicians and primary care givers. Many research studies focus on educating medical students. One blog, DIG@UTMB (<http://digutmb.blogspot.com>), has been a successful attempt by the University of Texas to distribute information as well as promote collaboration among dermatology students (Poonawalla & Wagner, 2006).

Few studies have targeted physicians and clinical staff. Members of the library services department at Western Sussex Hospital in England created a blog called "Snippets" that provided direct links to journal articles, external websites, guidelines and presentations for clinical staff. It was found the blog benefited a large community of practitioners who were often restricted by work schedules and distance to attend educational meetings (Glenday, Mathew, & Roddham, 2014). The University of Michigan Health Sciences libraries has created a project using blogging as well as other social media to be used by researchers who manage international research collaborations to improve communication and dissemination of research findings between themselves and bedside clinicians. They found that many of the researchers used the blog Google Docs (<http://www.google.com/docs>) most frequently and found it to be useful in distributing information to frontline clinicians and healthcare consumers (Anderson et al., 2009).

5. Music therapy blogs

Blogging within the professional field of music therapy has become an accepted way for music therapy clinicians to share information and collaborate within each subspecialty. There are blogs that focus on disseminating research, business development and current trends in music therapy practice such as, but not limited to: The Music Therapy Research Blog (<http://www.musictherapyresearchblog.com>) and Music Therapy Maven (<http://musictherapymaven.com>). There are other blogs like Soundscape Music Therapy (<http://soundscapemusictherapy.com>), that act as resources for those who are interested in using music to improve their overall well being for themselves or those for whom they care. Currently, there are not any blogs that focus on disseminating information about music therapy to subspecialty physicians such as neonatologists or oncologists.

Due to professional time constraints experienced in the hospital, not only by primary care givers, but by music therapists as well, traditional methods of educating and disseminating information about music therapy such as educational meetings, are often difficult and cumbersome. The purpose of this pilot study was to gain information about the effect of a music therapy blog on (1) awareness of NICU music therapy services, and (2) usefulness of the blog as an information source for primary care givers working in a neonatal intensive care unit.

6. Methodology

Thirty primary care givers working in a level three neonatal intensive care unit with an established NICU music therapy program at a large tertiary care facility in the southeast United States were invited to participate in the study. All participants were sent an initial email describing the study and were informed that by completing the initial pre-test survey, they were consenting to participate. Twelve primary care givers completed the initial pre-test survey and consent for participation. Primary care givers for this study were defined as neonatologists, nurse practitioners and physician assistants who were responsible for requesting music therapy services for their patients. Of the 12 participants, five were neonatologists, six were nurse practitioners and one was a physician assistant. The participants informed the researcher that they were not currently using a medical blog to acquire educational information related to their field of practice. The Florida State University Institutional Review Board gave approval for this study.

The dependent measure was a blog and survey created by the researcher. A professional colleague with knowledge in website development assisted the researcher with the design of the blog using WordPress, a free publishing software and content man-

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